DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 431 CS 211 985

AUTHOR Tait, Alice A.
TITLE A Pre-Student Teaching Experience for Secondary School Journalism and Publication Advisors.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; Journalism Education; School Surveys; *Teaching Assistants; Teaching Methods; *Undergraduate Students; *Writing Across the Curriculum; Writing Exercises
IDENTIFIERS Central Michigan University; *Student Assistants

ABSTRACT

A study conducted at Central Michigan University examined the effective use of undergraduate teaching assistants as small group leaders by the Journalism Department for its writing across the curriculum program (WAC). The teaching assistants who participated--students with a minor in teaching high school journalism--emerged as an important component in fulfilling WAC objectives because of their intense teaching interests and desire for pre-student teaching experience. The study focused on the differences between teaching Journalism 101, a large lecture mass media and mass society course, using the traditional departmental approach with four objective examinations and teaching the course using the new approach consisting of smaller classes, student assistants, extra credit journal exercises, chapter summaries, small group exercises, and three essay examinations. A student opinion survey reporting students' project reactions was administered, and findings revealed that the 36 (out of 45) students who completed the survey reacted positively to the new writing assignments and to the use of undergraduate student teaching assistants. (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED311431

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Alice A. Tait

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A Pre-Student Teaching Experience for Secondary School Journalism and Publication Advisors

Alice A. Tait

Department of Journalism

Central Michigan University

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS211985

Running Head: SECONDARY SCHOOL JOURNALISM AND PUBLICATION ADVISORS

Abstract

This paper described the use of undergraduate small group leaders as an aide toward achieving Central Michigan University's Journalism Department's writing across the curriculum program goals. Journalism 342, Teaching High School Journalism; a required course for high school journalism teaching minors, supplied the undergraduate teaching assistants.

A Pre-Student Teaching Experience for Secondary School Journalism and Publication Advisors

During the Fall of 1985, Central Michigan University's Academic Senate approved a University Program Guidelines amendment stating each course offered as part of the University Program must "require a significant amount of meaningful writing and ample opportunity for oral discussions."

As a result of this amendment; departments submitted (1) a report describing course writing assignments presently required, and (2) a description of the necessary resources needed for complying with the new writing requirements.

The Journalism Department responded by submitting a report describing the required writing in Journalism 101, Mass Media and Mass Society, a large lecture course used to satisfy the University Program requirements; and proposed and requested funding for a 1986-87 Winter semester journalism demonstration project.

The demonstration project identified optimal conditions, resources and assistants needed to achieve writing across the curriculum objectives. Undergraduate teaching assistants emerged as an important component toward fulfilling writing across the curriculum objectives. Journalism 342, Teaching High School Journalism, a required course for high school journalism teaching minors, supplied the undergraduate teaching assistants. Intense teaching interests, and a School of Education report recommending increased opportunities for pre-student teaching experiences made these students ideal participants. (The Consultants' Report on the Teacher Education Program at Central Michigan University, 1986.)

While the use of undergraduate small group leaders is a new phenomenon in the large lecture Mass Media and Mass Society course, it is used widely in other disciplines. A discussion of advantages and disadvantages follows. In the literature USGLs are referred to as undergraduate teaching assistants. (UTAs)

Literature Review

Research indicated a few department advantages from the use of USGLs. Baisinger, Peterson, and Spillman (1984) reported utilizing UTAs freed the instructor for handling individual classroom student problems, to conduct research, to teach upper-level courses, to increase department services and to increase the department's majors and minors.

Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Yerby (1987) discovered basic course students benefit from the use of UTAs as students develop a support system that is unlikely to develop in larger sections, and UTAs are likely to be empathetic as they recently enrolled in the basic course. Lerstrom (1985) reported utilizing UTAs allowed a class size reduction, thus, increasing opportunities for student participation.

Benefits for UTAs are numerous. Baisinger et al (1984) discovered the UTA teaching experience aided in the development of leadership, organizational and conflict management skills. UTAs also experienced increased self-confidence and personal trust.

Lerstrom (1985) reported UTAs forged a professional relationship while awarding credits enhanced department's control over the UTA's performance through the formal academic course evaluation process.

Some disadvantages associated with the use of UTAs were credibility gaps, limited teaching skills, poor attitudes, weak self-assurance, and impatience.

As UTAs knowledge of course content is limited, classroom students may perceive UTAs as not possessing necessary qualifications to lead discussion groups. UTAs limited teaching skills may encourage over empathizing with students' poor performances and problems. Such an attitude might undermine the usefulness and fairness of tests, speeches, etc. (Baisinger et al, 1984). Gray et al (1987) observed UTAs with poor attitudes are easily frustrated, judgmental, and internalized failure.

This paper described both the 1986-87 Fall-Winter Journalism Department's Writing Across The Curriculum Project (WAC), with emphasis on the Winter Demonstration Project. The Winter demonstration project emphasized the use of undergraduate small group leaders (USGLs) as an aide toward achieving writing across the curriculum program goals and proposes the use of USGLs is an effective tool for implementing WAC objectives. Keeping the use of USGLs in the forefront, this paper described students' reactions to USGLs and assignments, advantages to high school journalism minors who became USGLs, the use of USGLs to reduce the size of large lectures and resulting benefits, and the coordinator's views of the use of USGLs.

Overview

Phase I The project developed in two phases. Phase I, began the Fall of 1986-87, consisted of two models. Model I represented teaching Journalism 101 in two small classes with 50 students per section. To increase writing opportunity, the writer assigned students three essay examinations, one short two-three page paper, one long research paper, and one extra credit journal.

Model II consisted of one section with an approximate 300 student enrollment and reflected the department's traditional teaching approach by assigning students four objective examinations.

Phase II

The Winter Semester of 1986-87 ushered in Phase II consisting of three models developed from an interpretation of the university's mandate to implement significant and meaningful writing. Instructors defined significant and meaningful writing as (1) increasing writing opportunities (2) allowing students to experience growth and development while (3) mastering writing mechanics and critical thinking skills. Instructors developed assignments reflecting this definition and thus, required students to utilize higher level thinking skills (i.e., analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), encouraged and required classroom participation, reinforced, explored, enhanced, and developed course content, and research skills.

Based on the significant and meaningful writing definition and establishment of writing goals, each model contained some common elements: student assistants, (paid and those earning course credits) general exercises consisting of journals, summaries, and small group exercises, unique exercises and textbook selection, (both reflecting individual preferences) and student opinion surveys reporting students' project reactions. Model I is this paper's focus.

With a class of 50 students, Model I included these assignments; extra credit journals, chapter summaries, three essay examinations and small group exercises. Students volunteered participation in the extra credit journal assignment. Journal participation allowed students an opportunity to write in a no risk setting. Grades were

assigned on the basis of students fulfilling certain criteria to earn a specific grade. Students, therefore, wrote as much or as little in their journals depending on the desired number of extra credit points. For example, a journal earning an "A" required students to:

1. Regurgitate lecture and small group materials
2. Comment on lecture and small groups
   -Question
   -Agree-Disagree
   -Application of
3. Reactions to course, instructor, and small group.
   -Course critiques
   -Critique Instructor's Presentation of Materials
   (Small Group Discussion Leaders).
4. Application and synthesis of materials learned in class with the outside world.

The instructor dropped a requirement for each grade lower than an "A" beginning with requirement number four, read and collected the journals three times during the semester.

Students completed ten chapter summaries. Utilizing chapter summaries compelled students to read chapters, identify major ideas, experience an opportunity to write frequently and measured their understanding. Chapter summaries were read and evaluated by the instructor.

The instructor administered three short essay examinations and designed questions to measure students' knowledge while simultaneously measuring students, ability in critical analyses.

Instructor evaluated examinations required students to apply concepts, criticize, evaluate, compare and contrast. In addition to journals, chapter summaries, and essay examinations, students attended weekly a ten student small group section lead by a USGL. Small groups demassified the large lecture, afforded discussion and allowed students to participate in small group exercises. Small group exercises provided materials for writing and oral discussion. The instructor developed some exercises and borrowed others. USGLs played an integral role in the smaller section and enrolled in Journalism 342, Teaching High School Journalism, a required course for journalism minors designed to expose minors to journalism teaching methods and content. Students enrolled in the course selected one of two tracks. Track I students researched and prepared teaching high school journalism materials. Track II students acted as Journalism 101 USGLs. The researcher developed Track II based on the need for assistance to initiate a writing program in Journalism 101 and an earlier report (The Consultants' Report on the Teacher Education Program at Central Michigan University, 1986) expressed the need for educational majors and minors to experience more pre-student teaching opportunities.

USGLs attended all lectures, weekly meetings (which prepared them for the weekly small group presentation), and led one weekly small group session. Leaders developed a small group exercise and submitted a paper evaluating their experiences. USGLs earned course credit by attending lectures, weekly meetings and weekly sessions,

presentation of materials in meetings and small group sections, student course evaluations, instructor's classroom visit evaluations, a final paper and exercise. The instructor provided leaders with necessary materials and training for presentations in weekly sessions.

During weekly meetings, the instructor explained, exercises and leaders presented the exercises as presented in their sections. USGLs used meetings for general discussion, feedback sessions and an opportunity to discuss principles of teaching.

Results

The writer administered a questionnaire designed to measure the students' attitudes toward the exercises used to increase writing, classroom discussion and toward small group leaders. During the Winter, 1987, 45 students enrolled in Journalism 101, 36 students completed the questionnaire. For each exercise, students responded to a statement designed to elicit their attitudes toward the use of that exercise to improve writing skills, to expand thinking skills, promote classroom discussion, and learning class content.

Learning class content

Students favored group exercises most as an aid in learning class content (83%), essay examinations (72%), followed by chapter summaries were favored over journals. Students intensely disliked (38%) journals.

Writing skills

Students found chapter summaries the most helpful toward developing writing skills (77%) followed by small group exercises, (55%) with journals (41%) favored the least.

Expanding critical thinking

Essay examinations were overwhelmingly favored as a helpful activity toward expanding the students' critical thinking skills (79%). Group exercises (68%), chapter summaries (63%), and journals (38%) were favored in that order.

Providing classroom discussion

In this category, students most favored small groups as an activity for promoting classroom discussion (91%). Examinations ranked second (80%), followed by chapter summaries (36%) and journals (29%). Students disliked chapter summaries and journals as aides in promoting classroom discussion.

Cumulative percent

Of all assignments (journals, chapter summaries, small group exercises and essay examinations) students most favored essay examinations as an instrument for developing writing skills, expanding thinking on the assigned topic, promoting classroom discussion, learning class content, and promoting classroom discussion and learning class content. Students favored group exercises next, followed by chapter summaries, with the journals being the least favored.

Students found most assignments helpful rather than not helpful, with the exception of journals. A greater percentage of participating students reported the journal not helpful rather than helpful.

Undergraduate small group leaders

Students overwhelmingly appreciated the small group leaders' involvement and interaction.

The small group leaders submitted a paper evaluating themselves and the experience.

USGLs reactions

USGLs praised the pre-student teaching opportunity. The following statements reflect their attitudes:

> "This class has given me a lot as far as teaching experience goes." (David Wolfe, Winter, 1987. p.1)
>
> "I discovered some of the pitfalls and rewards involved with teaching." (Kevin Latta, Winter, 1987. p.2)
>
> "Gave the group leaders a taste of teaching in the classroom setting." (Todd Johnston, Winter, 1987. p.1)
>
> "I have grown from the experience." (Desmond Daniel, Winter, 1987. p.3)
>
> "An appreciation for the difficulty of the teaching profession." (Jay Rau, Winter, 1987. p.2)
>
> "I feel that Journalism 342 offers excellent experiences in teaching and in preparing a person for the role of a teacher." (Lanna M. Lindberg, Winter, 1987, p.4)

Students' reactions to USGLs

Students evaluated small group leaders on the basis of the leaders motivating students to do their best work, providing the best advice on studying for the course,

promoting positive interaction between students and small group leaders, promoting an atmosphere conducive to work and learning, USGLs' attitudes toward students, and ability to understand and explain assignments.

Students rated USGLs strongest on providing best advice (90%), followed by positive interaction (88%), attitudes ranked third (87%), with promoting an atmosphere conducive to work, and learning ranking fourth (83%). USGLs ability to understand and explain assignments ranked fifth (77%) and students evaluated leaders the lowest (64%) as to whether or not group leaders motivated students to do their best work.

Discussion

The writer does not attempt, to determine the "rightness or wrongness" of an assignment. The article's specific purpose is to report students attitudes toward new assignments introduced into the curriculum and support the use of USGLs. Whether students liked or disliked an assignment is an improper barometer for measuring the program's success. For example, students always protested essay examinations, however, the students identified examinations as the most favored tool for improving writing skills. To the writer's chagrin, students participating in the voluntary journal assignment appeared to dislike the assignment. The writer expected a positive response as students volunteered for the assignment.

The use of USGLs is not a new phenomenon. However, this report's results indicate that such an experience is mutually beneficial to both classroom students and USGLs.

As an instructor, teaching in a predominately undergraduate program, I found the greatest personal benefit of USGLs came from mentoring and teaching USGLs how to

teach. Traditionally, graduate students fulfill the professor's need to share professional enthusiasm and achievements. I found working with the USGLs inspiring and challenging. Training USGLs did not provide free time for research, or increased departmental services as the literature review suggested. In fact, training USGLs increased the instructor's work load. Training USGLs could free the instructor if departments provided release time for training.

A final observation is the relationship of USGLs to the classes. Some USGLs tended to, as the literature review suggested, over empathize with the students. It was difficult to overcome this tendency. The writer made the mistake of allowing USGLs to hand out and discuss examinations which provided a fertile ground for students to hold USGLs responsible for their performance. USGLs played no role in the examination's composition or scoring. The writer withdrew that procedure; however, the damage had been done and was irreversible. Subsequently, the writer did not allow USGLs involvement with the test.

References

Baisinger, W. H., Peterson, G. L., & Spillman, B. (1984). Undergraduates as colleagues: Using undergraduates as teaching assistants in the basic course. Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, 47, 60-63.

Chernay, G., Heller, B., & Sandefur, J. T. (1986). The Consultants' Report on the Teacher Education Program at Central Michigan University.

Daniel, J. (1987, April). Journalism 342. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Gray, P. L., Buerkel-Rothfuss, N. L., & Yerby, J. (1987, November). Integrating the graduate, undergraduate and education curricula: Training qualified staff for the basic course. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, Massachusetts.

Johnston, T. (1987, April). Evaluation of journalism 342. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Latta, K. (1987, April). Class experience evaluation journalism 342. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Lerstrom, A. (1985). Staffing the basic course and still having flexibility to meet program needs. Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, 54, 36-37.

Lindberg, L. (1987, April). Journalism 342: final paper. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Raw, J. (1987, April). My teaching experience. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Wolfe, D. (1987, April). Journalism 342: Class evaluation. Paper for Journalism 342, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.